

SELECTION OF ARMY PERSONNEL:

DEVELOPMENT OF THE DSP

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THE Directorate of Selection of Personnel was instituted in the British Army in the early summer of 1941, under the immediate control of the Adjutant-General. Its work had been foreshadowed about a year before, when the Army Council decided to introduce selection tests into units receiving intakes of recruits. This initial phase was entrusted to the director of military training, who appointed as his adviser a civilian (later aided by 3 assistants) to devise and to arrange for the application of a 20 min. test in the various training regiments for artillery, engineers, ASC, armoured corps, infantry, &c., throughout the country. Separate, but similar, arrangements were also in force for the testing of recruits in training regiments for anti-aircraft duties. One great disadvantage of this scheme was the length of time needed to transfer an unsuitably allocated recruit from one arm of the Service to another and to procure the discharge of a recruit found unfit, owing to lack of intelligence or mental instability, for any kind of Army work. In contrast to the practice obtaining in the Navy and in the Royal Air Force, it had been laid down by Parliament that no man could be deemed enlisted until he had been posted by the Ministry of Labour to one arm of the Service (and to its training regiment), after his attendance at one of that Ministry's recruiting centres. The DSP was provided with a staff of administrative and technically qualified men and women of military rank to conduct its work.

Its institution followed the receipt by the War Office of a memorandum on the selection and allocation of personnel prepared by one of the command psychiatrists of the Army medical services, and of a report from a committee of three psychologists appointed to advise him by the Adjutant-General. Both the memo and the report had urged that the new directorate be established; that a non-verbal test of intelligence be given to every recruit on his medical examination at the recruiting centres; that mobilisation depots be established throughout the country, to which recruits should first be sent after their attendance at the recruiting centres, and at which a more detailed psychological and psychiatric examination could be carried out before their allocation to any arm of the Service; that a permanent staff of non-commissioned officers be provided in the new directorate to carry out the routine application of the necessary tests; and that the directorate should be in the closest possible relation not only with the directorate of the Army medical services (concerned with the problems of Army health), but also with the directorates of recruiting and mobilisation and of military training (concerned with the problems of Army personnel).

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The first work of the DSP was to select NCOs suitable for the routine work of applying selection tests. Most

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of those chosen had been teachers in civil life and were trained by a staff of commissioned officers who were qualified and experienced in vocational psychology. The next step was to introduce a well-tried non-verbal test of intelligence at the recruiting centres. By January, 1942, 85% of all intakes were receiving this test in a shortened form; and by March every recruit for the Army (save in Northern Ireland), man or woman, was being thus tested. A card was prepared for each recruit on which all information about him that related to personnel problems was entered, and the Hollerith system was adopted for future analysis of the data thus recorded. A "job analysis" of the numerous occupations in the Army was also begun, the special mental and physical qualities being systematically ascertained which were required by each.

Towards the end of 1941, an experiment was begun of using an extended selection procedure in training regiments. Here men underwent tests which assessed mainly clerical, mechanical and signalling aptitudes, and also took a verbal test of intelligence. The recruits filled up a form giving their past educational and other histories, interests and hobbies; and they were sympathetically interviewed by commissioned (usually regimental) officers who had been already trained for this important work. Recruits of undesirably low intelligence or of doubtfully adequate mental stability were referred by these interviewing officers to the local Army psychiatrist. The job analysis of Army occupations made it possible to recommend each recruit, thus tested, interviewed, and considered in the light of his past education and employment and of his present interests and hobbies, for suitable employment in his arm. Potential "tradesmen" and men clearly better suited to other arms were able to be transferred early in their Army careers.

This small experiment proved so encouraging that the work was gradually expanded. It was succeeded in May, 1942, by a small try out of the present general service procedure in 10 units. The decision was now made to allocate *all* recruits at the recruiting centres to a General Service corps, and to establish primary training centres throughout the country to which they would be directly sent before allocation to any arm of the Service. These important changes came into force in July. Many additional officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, were needed by the rapidly expanding DSP. The non-verbal test of intelligence was still given at the recruiting centres, in order that units linked to those arms which required the personnel of highest intelligence should have a selected intake and so reduce troop movements when they were posted. Soon after, command personnel selection officers, each provided with NCO and clerical assistance, were appointed for local supervisory duty.

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In the selection of officers—another branch of the DSP's work—the psychiatrists have played a more dominant rôle than the psychologists. For here there

is less need of the discovery of appropriate mental aptitudes. Apart from adequate intelligence, the essential desiderata for a good officer are qualities of character and temperament, constituting a suitable personality. The vocational psychologist has always regarded tests of personality as far less reliable than those of aptitude. He has depended rather on the interview for the assessment of such characteristics as honesty, industry, coöperativeness and sociability. Moreover, slight degrees of mental instability or other quasi-psychopathic tendencies are much less important among "other ranks" than among officers. In the summer of 1941, a War Office selection board (WOSB) was experimentally set up to improve the methods of assessing officer-candidates and so to reduce the numbers of men rejected from officer cadet training units with consequent waste of time, effort and expense. At this unit, during their two or three days' stay, they were confronted by military testing officers with professional and other situations in which they had opportunities of displaying their possession or their lack of initiative, ingenuity, capacity for leadership and courage. They were also subjected to psychological tests and to various psychiatric observations, many of them initially of a tentative, experimental character. But such success was achieved, particularly by the situation tests and by the interviews with the psychiatrists, that in the following spring WOSBs were established in every command throughout the country. Their work is largely clinical; psychiatrists, psychologists, and military testing officers live with the candidates during their stay in the unit; they discuss their independently formed verdicts in the presence of the president of the board who regards them as his technical advisers in determining the acceptability of each officer-candidate and his suitability for some particular arm of the Service.

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The director of the DSP, a professional soldier, has to be in intimate touch with those formulating the ever-changing requirements of the Army. Though seldom given sufficient notice to allow of really thorough preparation, he has had to produce adequate numbers of the best-suited men and women needed in the various arms of the Service, and to select and train an ever-increasing staff. The DSP has received the invariable support and sympathy of the present Adjutant-General. It has had to spend much time in devising or adapting tests so that they are better suited to the Army's needs than any hitherto employed in civil life for vocational guidance and selection. Some of those suggested have been adopted; others (e.g., tests for drivers and gun-layers) have been rejected. The value of these tests had to be experimentally determined within the Army before they could be applied on a wide scale. Their correlations with other tests already in use has needed calculation; "factor analysis" has also usually been carried out.

From the outset the DSP has established close contact with the corresponding but considerably older department in the American Army, which has generously sent

to our War Office full information of its experience and methods. Similar assistance has been received from those psychologists carrying out corresponding work for the Admiralty and the Royal Air Force. The relations of the DSP towards the newly formed directorate of psychiatry within the Army medical services have throughout been cordial. The Army psychiatrists have coöperated in all the primary training centres, in the WOSBs, and in field units. The consultant psychiatrist or his director, or both, attend the meetings of the advisory committee with the War Office staff of the DSP. The psychologist depends on the psychiatrist for the psychopathological examination of men who through deficient intelligence or mental instability need special placing in the Army or discharge. In return, the psychologist informs the psychiatrist of the scores obtained from the intelligence test, and possibly will help to detect psychopathic conditions by the responses made to different sections of this test. Regular conferences are held at the War Office between the DSP headquarters staff and the advisory committee, the members of which have assisted also in conducting several investigations and in reporting on the directorate's work at various training centres. A conference with civilian psychologists, mostly in charge of university psychological laboratories throughout the country, has also been held, at which various offers of help were received and considered. Some offered statistical help, others the free use of their laboratories for research. The problem of selecting additional officers for the ATS was effected by liaison with the psychologists at Cambridge engaged upon the selection of specialists for anti-aircraft units. Contact was also established with the Medical Research Council, one of whose research workers carried out an investigation to devise the shorter form of intelligence test needed at the recruiting centres; another worked on the problem of the avoidance of traffic accidents among Army drivers. Technical investigators of the Industrial Health Research Board of the MRC had early been seconded to the staff of the directorate; while the staff of the vocational guidance department of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology was depleted almost to vanishing point, to supply the urgent need for selection work in the Army and Navy. Work similar to that of the DSP has been going on both in the Navy and in the RAF. Altogether, it will provide sociologists and anthropologists with a valuable survey of the distribution of aptitudes among a vast number of the population of this country, and with data which will still be useful after the war, when those now in the fighting Services return to civil life.



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